
Baby Flathead (Plagiocephaly)

What is baby flathead?

The bones of your baby's head are very thin and flexible up to 1 year of age. This makes your baby's head very soft and easy to mold. For the first few months of life your baby will not be strong enough to roll over on his own. If your baby prefers to look in one direction or if your baby is always on his back, part of his skull may become flat. Your baby may also develop a flat spot if he spends long periods of time in a car seat or reclining seat. This flattening is caused by constant pressure on one part of the skull. This skull flattening is called **plagiocephaly** (play-gee-o-SEFF-ah-lee). While plagiocephaly does not affect how a baby's brain develops, it can affect a baby's appearance by causing the head and face to develop unevenly.

How can I prevent plagiocephaly?

To prevent your baby from developing a flattened skull, change her position often. Put your baby on her tummy to play several times a day. Use a firm play surface such as a carpeted floor or an activity mat on the floor. Tummy time will also help your baby:

- develop early control of her head
- strengthen the muscles in the upper body
- learn to roll over
- reach for objects
- learn to crawl.

You can also put your baby on her side to play. To keep your baby in a side lying position while playing, put a firm rolled up towel or blanket behind her back.

Carrying your baby by using baby slings is an excellent way to change the position of your baby and to stay close to baby. Limit car seat use for traveling only. Also limit the amount of time your baby sleeps in swings, bouncy chairs and other infant seats.

My baby hates tummy time! What should I do?

Some ways to help your baby learn to love playtime on their tummy:

- Laying your baby on your chest when he is awake is a good way to get your baby used to lying on his tummy.
- Put your baby on his tummy after each diaper change. Add a little extra tummy time each day. Try a back rub!
- Give your baby lots of interesting things to look at. Put brightly colored toys or a mirror directly in front of him and remember you are most interesting to your baby.
- Give your baby support by putting a rolled towel under his chest. Prop your baby's arms in front of the towel.

Baby looks in only one direction.

What should I do?

Many babies prefer to look in one direction when they are lying on their backs.

Some things you can do to encourage her to look in both directions are:

- When you are holding your baby during playtime, use mobiles or brightly colored toys to encourage your baby to look in the less-preferred direction.

If your baby's crib is against the wall, place your baby's head at opposite ends of the crib each night. Babies prefer to look out into the room.

What should I do if my baby's head already has a flat spot?

If your baby's head has a noticeable flat spot that does not seem to be improving, you may still be able to reshape it. Talk to your baby's doctor.

Change your baby's position often when he is awake. Infant carriers, slings, bouncy chairs, etc are helpful. Babies like to look at faces, interesting toys or listen to voices and music. This can encourage them to look in all directions.

To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death (SIDS), your baby should always be placed on their backs to sleep

When should I call the doctor?

During your routine visits to your doctor, discuss with your doctor your concerns about the shape of your baby's head.

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